

THE
UNIVERSAL
RELIGION:
BAHAISM

HIPPOLYTE
DREYFUS

THE
UNIVERSAL RELIGION:
BAHAISM
By
HIPPOLYTE DREYFUS

Bahai
Publishing
Society

THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION:
BAHAISM

Uniform with this Volume

THE
MYSTERIOUS FORCES OF
CIVILISATION

WRITTEN IN PERSIAN BY

AN EMINENT BAHAI PHILOSOPHER

AND NOW FIRST PUT INTO ENGLISH

BY

JOHANNA DAWUD

THE
UNIVERSAL RELIGION:
BAHAISM
ITS RISE AND SOCIAL IMPORT

BY
HIPPOLYTE DREYFUS
DOCTEUR EN DROIT

“Religion should help union and harmony between people. Let it not become a cause of dissension and hypocrisy.”—BAHĀ’U’LLĀH.

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PREFACE

A RECENT work, published simultaneously in French, English and Persian,¹ again draws the attention of those preoccupied by religious studies and the spiritual evolution of humanity to the great movement of unification and union which to-day is Bahaism.

By this work, Laura Clifford Barney has powerfully contributed to placing within the reach of the public the teaching of the new religion, for she has given, in the very simple form in which they were

¹ *Some Answered Questions*, and also *An-Nūrū'l-Abhā Fi Muṣāwadaṭ 'Abdī'l-Bahā*, collected by Laura Clifford Barney (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., London, 1908), and *Les Leçons de St-Jean-d'Acre* (at Leroux, Paris, 1908).

held, the conversations she had with the "Master of 'Akkā." Till now, in fact, considering the small number of works translated into any one of the European languages, the knowledge of the philosophy and theology of Bahaism was limited only to the Orientalists who could read in the text the works of Bahā'ū'llāh or of 'Abdu'l-Bahā, and to the adepts among whom the Master's Tablets are in circulation. *Some Answered Questions*, therefore, covers a deficiency particularly perceptible in the West. And likewise theories sometimes rendered most complicated even for Eastern people, by the multiplicity of philosophical conceptions, can now be fixed in a simple manner.

It seemed to us interesting to show what position such an important move-

ment has in history, to examine, independently of any philosophical system, and solely from the point of view of social institutions briefly sketched, what could be its influence in modern civilisation.

Such is the origin of this book, whose somewhat summary character I do not fail to acknowledge, but which, nevertheless, may be the cause of inciting abler pens to treat more fully of this vast subject. The great spread of Bahaism in England and America has prompted me to publish also in English this essay that I have just brought out in France, and which I offer to the intelligent interlocutor of *Some Answered Questions* as a modest addition to her work.

DĀRU'S-SALĀM, VEVEY.

August 1908.

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PART I

THE RISE OF BAHAIISM

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SCIENCE AND RELIGION

ONE of the deepest thinkers of the end of last century, M. Guyau—struck by the decay of dogmatic religions, seeing the churches more and more deserted by those who formerly came there to pray, and seeking in the contemporary attitude of mind to disentangle that portion of the old beliefs that could survive—shows us how the idea of association, which is at the bottom of each of them, and which, according to him, is the most lasting thing they contain, will therefore remain the only basis of the diverse organisations which, in the future, will replace the Churches. And in his interesting philosophical study, to which he gave the rather

pessimistic title of "The Irreligion of the Future,"¹ he prophesies the three special forms that this idea will assume.

According as men will be associated on the ground of their intelligence, of their will, or of their sensibility, societies of research—scientific, philosophical or religious—groupings in view of public assistance and of moral culture, or simple artistic associations will be formed; it is thus, he tells us, that the religions of the future will be exercised.

There is another form of association that Guyau and the Positivists do not seem to have foreseen, which still responds to one of the most evident tendencies of our epoch, and which is very certainly of

¹ M. Guyau, *L'Irreligion de l'Avenir* (Félix Alcan, Paris, 1900).

a much more general import than the particular groupings indicated above, and consequently much more efficacious for the progress of society: I wish to speak of the association of religions themselves, apparent to-day in this vast movement towards the religious unity of all humanity, known under the name of Bahaism, and which for some years has been propagated with surprising rapidity in the most heterogeneous centres. If this great philosopher had no knowledge of a movement whose great importance Renan,¹ however, from the beginning had foreseen; or else if, having known of it, he could have seen in it nothing else than a new sect, it is probable that he was not able to entirely rid himself of hereditary

¹ Ernest Renan, *Les Apôtres*, p. 377.

conceptions. In spite of everything, confounding religion with catechism, law with superstition, God with the priest, he could not imagine that any theism whatever, however liberal it might be, could be reconcilable with the progress of human reason, nor agree with the exigencies of the modern scientific mind. And the pretended opposition of science and religion formed itself before him, as an insurmountable obstacle, as if each of them had not its particular sphere, and did not respond to distinct needs of our mentality.

As long as there are people who will not be content with the progressive discovery of the "how" of things, and who—impatient of advancing with the slow step of scientific conquests in the relative order

of human knowledge, curious to know the "why" of the universe, turn courageously towards the absolute, which is the domain of metaphysical speculations, philosophy and religion will be for them fields of activity necessary to the demands of their reason. The faith which, according to St Paul, is "the evidence of things unseen," is likewise for them only "the courage of reason which rushes forward"; and science, without going out of its own domain, could not combat it. Much rather will both, stronger and thus more liberal, in the future lend one another mutual co-operation in the ever-increasing ardent research of the unknown.

NECESSITY OF A RENEWAL OF RELIGIONS

IF, in our epoch of scientific progress, when instruction is no longer the privilege of a minority, the greater part of thinkers have gone from the Churches, and loyalty to oneself has forced so many people to break with the creeds whose traditions and superannuated rites they could no longer accept, it does not follow that the religious mind should with time disappear from civilised nations : it suffices, in order to get a clear idea of this, to understand the high religious import of many expressed doubts, and to look for what there is behind many scoffing scepticisms.

If it is thus, if a religious attitude is

natural and necessary, if, as we think, it is an obligation for every thinking man to develop his spirituality and the force it procures for him, it is of paramount importance to reconcile all those whom the barriers of religions have separated, and who, by conviction or imitation, have come to despise and hate one another.

And to attain this aim it will suffice, then, to show the one principle which is at the bottom of their beliefs, to free them from the constraint of the domineering clergy, and to explain to those who have rejected the religion of their fathers the profound truth and high moral import of religious teaching which is in no wise opposed to the discoveries of science or to the free exercise of reason. Such is the task whose immediate necessity makes itself

felt more and more, and which to-day is about to be accomplished by Bahaism presenting itself as the necessary outcome of all religions.

I well hear the objection : Yet a new religion, a sect, a flag, a name ! If Bahaism refers to liberal principles, if it does not impose beliefs, if it leaves man to his reason and conscience—it only expresses the thought of all those who reflect, and there is no need at all to hoist a new flag at the risk of further dividing up poor humanity ! Alas ! if this humanity were already evolved enough to understand instinctively the beauty of generous thoughts, to accept them intuitively, and to conform its acts to them, if man were divine to this point, then evidently there would be no need of some-

thing new. But if precisely these generous ideas : the love of one's neighbour, satisfaction in the accomplishment of good, detachment from personal inclinations, and the directing of all individual powers for the advancement of humanity—if these ideas have not yet exercised their influence on the earth, it is because those who share them, and who combat for them, are already marked with a startling label : they are Catholics, Muhammadans, or Free Thinkers ; whatever they do, they only make an impression on the limited group of their co-religionists, and they cannot directly exercise the least influence on the enormous mass of other men who are ever rendered more or less sceptical by prejudices of race and education.

BAHAISM—ITS CHARACTER

BAHAISM is not a new religion ; it is Religion renewed. On the sharp edges of the pyramid of religions, Protestants, Catholics, Muhammadans, Buddhists, etc., are struggling against one another, trying to bring over by force neighbouring people to their own side, saying : This alone is the true religion, others are false. And for centuries, under pretence of proselytism, they are exhausting themselves to no purpose in the most criminal of struggles. If, instead of that, everyone, on his own side, from the standpoint of his own religion, would simply try to look to God and to advance in goodness, all

would soon see that the summit of the pyramid is common to all sides, and that each religion represents, not the Absolute Truth, which is unseizable, and of which we can only obtain a relative part, but is only the result of a special effort towards the knowledge of God ! And on this high summit they would meet without difficulty ! Then rivalries would disappear and reconciled humanity could work together, without intermission, at its development and progress.

This, Bahaism has understood. Consequently it goes without saying that it does not demand its adepts to abjure their old religion ; it does not pretend to represent alone the whole Truth ; on the contrary, it recognises Truth in fundamental principles which are the basis of

all former dispensations, and which for that very reason form the standpoint of concord too long lost sight of. And if it requires people to renounce ancient superstitions, to abandon the dead letter in order to be penetrated by the living and vivifying spirit, then by that very means it confirms the original purity of their religion, whilst helping them to know and love everything profoundly beautiful in the others.

Without wishing here to be metaphysical, nor to enter into the details of what would constitute the Bahai theology, which would be overstepping the limits of such a summary work, it will suffice for me to indicate that the Bahais believe that from all eternity God has raised up among human creatures higher beings

who have inculcated mankind with the great moral principles on which societies are founded, and have thus been the supreme guides of its evolution. In the fruitful earth of the garden of humanity, the delicate plants of generous virtues—the flowers of progress—would soon be stifled under the entangled bind-weeds of our egoisms and passions if the Divine Gardener did not tend them. Such is the role of the Prophet, modest in appearance, colossal in reality ; for, whatever idea one may have of his nature, however little one may reflect, one cannot help recognising his preponderant influence. If humanity is what it is to-day ; if so many glorious discoveries have up to this extended the boundaries of our frail knowledge ; if societies have been formed ; it is

because souls like Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, and Confucius have made man conscious of himself and thus shake off the state of original barbarity.

It is therefore important for each of us to be penetrated by this idea, and to recognise as brothers those who are led, by identical efforts in different centres, to a civilisation strange to ours. The tendency that we have to consider our own religion as the only divine one is so profoundly rooted in our minds that even education cannot completely eradicate it. Besides, those whom leisure or tastes incite to the study of comparative religions are the smallest minority contrasted with the legions who accept the ready-made ideas given them. And nothing less than the influence of such a

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vast religious movement is necessary to put an end to such a grave superstition.

THE GREAT PROPHETS

ALL these different Prophets whose teachings the Holy Scriptures have preserved for us represent therefore one and the same force, one and the same spirit, one and the same intelligence, one and the same Truth—God. And, under whatever sky they may have appeared, in whatever epoch they may have lived, they all have given to humanity the same teaching, more and more perfect, more and more complete, according to the evolution of humanity. And accordingly the wonderful reciprocal influence of the Prophet on his people, and of the people

on their Prophet, appears natural to us in its divine signification ; for the role of the Prophet, in order to be understood, in no wise demands a belief in miracles, and let us hasten to say that for a Bahai there is nothing supernatural. Revelation is not considered as something miraculous, supernatural in the vulgar sense of the word : the supernatural should only be understood as that which constitutes the higher spheres of nature, the vast unknown domain, into which, however, by the investigations of thought, and the researches of science, we are permitted to penetrate more and more every day. Revelation is only the result of a mystic penetration into this domain, the closer communion of some privileged souls with the Great Intelligence which presides over

the advancement of worlds. This communion, this consciousness that man has of his place in the world, this relationship in which he feels himself with the rest of creatures, from his nearest to the most distant tribes, and to all beings of nature, is precisely what legitimates his place on the summit of creation. And the greatest man, the Prophet, is a being who appears from time to time, in whom this consciousness surpasses every other sentiment, and who acquires thereby an influence which the greatest conquerors or the greatest scholars never had in history.

One of those, and the latest in date, was Bahā'u'llāh, whom millions of individuals, from the four corners of the earth—Hindoos, Zoroastrians, Buddhists,

Christians, Jews, and Muhammadans recognise to-day as the greatest Manifestation of God, and who thus groups around him those who till now seemed irreconcilable. He was born in Persia, in the luminous Orient whence have come all the Prophets, by this mysterious law which wills that, just as the sun rises in the East, it should also be from that quarter that the great leading Lights of humanity appear. Perhaps a like phenomenon can be sufficiently explained by the purer sky of those climates, or by the larger part given to meditation and to introspection, in a life where the difficulties of existence seem less great than elsewhere ?

I should now like to show briefly how, among the fanatical Muhammadans

of Persia, a movement has taken place which to-day appears in the world as a lesson of liberalism.

BABISM

AT the end of the year 1852 the Persian and Ottoman governments agreed to exile to Baghdād a certain number of families whose presence in Iran, according to what the chiefs of the orthodox religion said, constituted a scandal and a danger to public peace.

As a matter of fact, for nearly eight years Persia had been the theatre of one of the bloodiest religious conflicts that its history ever had to register since the day when the ancient Parsee civilisation had given way before the sword of triumphant Islam. But neither the persecutions of the fanatised crowds nor the

effort of the royal armies were able to succeed in mastering those who had declared themselves disciples of the Bāb. It is known how in 1844 the masses had been suddenly raised by the young reformer announcing that he was the Imām Mahdī, the Prophet of the pure lineage of Muhammad, whose reappearance had been expected for centuries by the pious,¹ whom he had now come to prepare for the apparition of "Him whom God would manifest."

If his movement had finished by a seeming revolt against the clergy and the

¹ For all which concerns the history of the Bāb and the early times of Bahaism see the book by A. L. M. Nicolas, entitled *Seyyed Ali Mohammed, dit le Bab* (Dujarric, Paris, 1905); and also *Religions et Sociétés* (Alcan, Paris, 1905); and E. G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative, written to illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (Cambridge, 1891).

conservative orthodoxy of Persia, certainly it was not one against Islam, for, on the contrary, the Bāb claimed to accomplish in his person all the prophecies of the Qur‘ān and the Ḥadīths. Had not Muhammad received the assurance from Djibrā‘īl that “God would bring religion from the sky to the earth and that then it would reascend to Him in a day whose length was to be a thousand years” ?¹ According to the popular legend, just ten centuries had passed since the mysterious disappearance of the last Imām, who had finished establishing on earth the religion of the Prophet which for these ten centuries had been corrupted by ignorant priests. What did the divine word signify, if not that the moment had at last come for religion to

¹ *Qur‘ān*, xxxii, 4:

ascend to its original celestial purity ?

This was the reforming work to which the Bāb had invited his compatriots, at the same time showing them how to free themselves from the material and intellectual misery in which they were kept by a government helpless before the prevarications of officials and by ignorant Mullās whose only anxiety was to retain their lucrative prestige. He had urgently exhorted them to prepare for the coming of “Him whom God would manifest,” the Great Prophet whom all the Holy Scriptures had announced for the Last Days.

Although the Bāb had not meant to propagate his doctrine by sword and fire, but, on the contrary, had called everyone to discuss with him the truth of his claim, yet it is easy to understand what hostilities

such ideas would meet with from all those who for one reason or another held any power. The whole country at once arose for or against him, and ardent missionaries set out from north to south, and from east to west, to spread the good news ; one of them, and not the least famous, a woman, Qurratu'l-'Ain, is incontestably among the number of the most powerful personalities of our time.

The majority of these missionaries set out with such zeal to spread the Cause that it even cost them their lives ; but the blood of martyrs never flowed in vain under the executioner's axe : it filtered into the Persian soil ; and, in spite of hostile fanaticism, produced an abundant harvest of generous ideas sustaining to humanity ! The Bāb himself, who, since the day of his

proclamation, had been dragged from prison to prison, after a mock trial was executed on one of the public places of Tabriz in 1850. Meanwhile the revolt was gaining the whole country. His death, which followed that of his principal disciples, did not stop the movement which he had started. Whole crowds were converted to Babism without even having read his writings, without knowing anything of his doctrine but what had been transmitted from ear to ear. They only knew that a new era of liberty and progress was about to begin, for the triumph of which thousands of Muhammadans had not hesitated to sacrifice life, and that a new Prophet was to be expected, the Great Manifestation of God, whose annunciator had been the Bāb, as John the

Baptist had been the annunciator and forerunner of Jesus.¹

¹ It must, however, be remembered that the role of the Bāb is not limited to that of annunciator, and that the reform of Islam, to which his name is attached, and which was the point of departure of Bahaism, has caused him to be considered as a great Prophet, the bearer of a new Law, in the same way as Bahā'ū'llāh. On the different kinds of Prophets, cp. *Some Answered Questions*, p: 188.

THE EXILE OF THE BABIS

For two years after the execution, which took place at Tabriz, the Persian government exiled numerous families, against whom no other charge could be brought than that of belonging to the new sect. From this moment probably half the Persian population would have been banished if the movement were to be completely extirpated or even impeded in its rapid progress.

Among those who thus arrived at Baghdād at the end of 1852, there arose a Babi who was to thoroughly transform the character of the new doctrine, or rather to extract from it a true, universal

religion destined to unite and develop all existing religions. Looking closely into the Bāb's work, in spite of the height of his inspired views, we cannot fail to notice in it a certain sectarian particularism which would have confined to Shi'ite Islam the benefits of a reform which, nevertheless, contained in potentiality a marvellous instrument for the progress of humanity. Bahā'u'llāh, one of the earliest disciples, was the one to give to this movement the import which the Bāb himself had foretold, and, recognising the sacred character of all former religions, united them in one new form more suitable than the others to the human tendencies of the nineteenth century. He did more ; by breaking with ritualist traditions, by setting reason free from dogmatic fetters,

he paved the way for the harmony of religions with free-thought, a fact till now considered impossible.

BAHĀ'U'LLĀH

MĪRZĀ ḤUSAĪN 'ALĪ NŪRĪ, revered to-day by innumerable believers under the name of Bahā'u'llāh, was born at Nūr in Māzan-derān on the 12th of November 1817. He belonged to a very powerful and noble family from which the Qājār sovereigns liked choosing their viziers and councillors. The life of a courtier, however, was little in accordance with his tastes, and he was completely indifferent to the advantages he could have gained from his father's position and wealth. Besides this, he was possessed of a force of will and personality which did not harmonise well with human constraint. So, while still young, he de-

voted himself to a life of meditation, in which all his good qualities were soon more fully developed.

Through the infinite gentleness of his nature, combined with his indomitable energy, he was drawn towards the misery which was about to degenerate the people who were under the domination of a clergy as ignorant as it was corrupt. But this attraction, far from rousing his pity, only made him feel the imperious need of efficacious reforms.

Far beyond Islam, in whose midst his activity evolved, his higher thoughts flew towards the world of human sufferings, and already he conceived the remedy he would bring them: regeneration by work and love, these were the two pillars of his sociology.

He was nearly thirty when, through one of those missionaries who was stirring up Persia, he became acquainted with the new doctrine that the young Prophet of Shīrāz was revealing to Muhammadans benumbed by secular apathy. Immediately he grasped its deep value and its inspired source.

From that time he had but one object, which was to come into contact with all those who took an active part in Babism, and, regardless of danger, to consecrate to the Cause all his ability and power. Although the Bāb never had an opportunity of meeting him, he soon recognised all that he might expect from the new and ardent disciple who, without the least hesitation, had immediately sacrificed his social position and quietude. Two beings so

perfectly made to act in concert have no need to see one another in order to be mutually attracted, and Bahā'u'llāh soon became entrusted with the most intimate thoughts of the young Prophet. A regular correspondence was immediately established between them ; and thus, as early as the end of 1848, when at the famous Council of Bedesht the Babis—deprived of their leader imprisoned at Mākū, uneasy about their future—were trying to make final arrangements with regard to the organisation of the movement, he it was who the disciples looked upon as the most authorised representative of the Master.

In order to explain the preponderant part immediately played by Bahā'u'llāh in the march of events, Persian historians state that when the Bāb arrived at the

gates of the capital, in the hope of an audience with the Shah, Bahā'u'llāh came to visit him at the village of Khānlīq, some farsakhs distant from Tih-rān. But, besides their giving no details about an interview which, however, could not but have been famous, the fact is absolutely denied by all those who have the best opportunity of knowing the truth; and the authorised writer of the "Traveller's Narrative"¹ nowhere makes any allusion to this supposed meeting

¹ Cp. E. G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative, written to illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (Cambridge, 1891).

BAGHDĀD

ON his arrival at Baghdād at the end of 1852, his role became affirmed.

He had just left the Āmbār prison at Tihhrān, where he had been shut up because of his notoriety in the new sect at the time of the terrible persecutions which followed the attempt upon the life of the Shah.¹ For, after some months of imprisonment, during which he was submitted to the most cruel treatment, as it was evident that he not more than the others had been

¹ It is known how two fanatical Babis came to Tihhrān with the criminal purpose of killing the Shah Nāṣiru'd-Dīn, in order to avenge the Bāb's martyrdom. Fortunately he was hardly hurt ; but this attempted assassination again drew the fury of the Shiite clergy and of the civil authorities on the sect, and during the weeks which followed the attempt hundreds of Babis perished.

responsible for the criminal attempt of the two young fanatics, and also as the accredited Ministers at Tih^hrān had transmitted to the Shah remonstrances from their respective governments with reference to the continual massacres which for some time had been dishonouring Persia, a firman gave him his liberty and permitted him to live outside imperial territory, in the holy places where the martyred Imāms repose, the tombs of Karbala and Nadjaf.¹

As soon as this news had become known, the Babis from all parts decided to place themselves also safe from the hatred of their compariots ; and, going voluntarily into exile, whole families in long caravans

¹ Karbala and Nadjaf, near Bagh^hdād, where the tombs of H^usain and 'Ali are to be found, are the most celebrated places of pilgrimage of Shiite Islam.

preceded or followed Bahā'u'llāh on his way to Baghdād.

The community thus assembled on the banks of the Tigris was therefore composed of the most heterogeneous elements ; some, full of good will and zeal, hoped by work to remake for themselves the position they had lost in their own country ; others, like beasts exhausted after a long pursuit who take refuge in the midst of a dense thicket, only thought of the possibility of escape from the fury of the Mullās who were fanaticising the people against them. All arrived, with their respective weaknesses, needs, disappointments, and ambitions, without any other bond between them, than that faith which had given them a like taste for sacrifice, as well as a common hope of the near triumph of their ideas,

which would be the reward for all their sufferings. The relative security they enjoyed in Turkey, following on the constant dangers which for so long had kept all their faculties on the watch, ought necessarily to have had a most depressing influence on such a community, especially if we call to mind that, with rare exceptions, none of them had known the Bāb, and that only very few of them had been able to fathom his teaching. They had devoted themselves to him with that naïve enthusiasm which leads the crowds on the Deliverer's steps, in the belief that all that was necessary was to be enrolled under his flag and to be ready to shed one's blood, in order to revolutionise the world, when all miseries would at once be suppressed. They did not know his doctrine ; certain

of them, even more simple than others, only thought that that which was forbidden before the coming of the Bāb had become lawful, since he had reformed the religion of Muhammad. We can imagine what troubles such a condition of mind must have caused among the little community, arriving in an unknown country, where the problems of material life assumed a most urgent and gloomy aspect, and after the ruin that it had just experienced in its own country.

It fell to Bahā'u'llāh's lot to bring a little order into the ideas and actions of the Babis of Baghdād. Immediately on his arrival he set himself to the task, and up to the end of 1854 he entirely consecrated himself to his organising work. Although nothing designated him officially

as their leader, from the earliest days he secretly confided to his most intimate friends that he felt himself called to take from thence on the direction of the movement, and he led them to understand that He whom the Bāb had announced to them as being the Supreme Manifestation was none other than he himself, and that God had given him the mission to direct them. But he did not yet decide to make the news known, as the friends were not yet prepared to understand it, and the moment had not come to change the aspect of the movement. On the contrary, it was necessary for them to be penetrated by the teachings of the Bāb, and put his doctrine into practice, before it would become possible to lead his disciples towards new destinies. This was known

as his first declaration—quite a secret one—which in no wise pointed him out to the suspicions of the authorities, and which left to the uninitiated all their ideas about the future evolution of the movement. The influence he at once assumed over his companions in exile soon confirmed those to whom he had revealed his mission in the belief that he was not mistaken as to the extent of his powers.

He decided, however, to leave his companions to themselves for some time ; and, probably desirous of seeking in the calm of peaceful seclusion the new strength which would be necessary for the accomplishment of his work, he hastily set out from Baghdād, to the great despair of his friends, without revealing to mortal the place of his retreat. For two years he

settled down in the mountains to the north of Sulāimānyiah, living the life of a hermit, which frees man from all the fetters of society, leaving him entirely to the source of inspirations, the great communion with God and nature. Who can tell the power of strength thus stored up by one whose sole object is to use it for the good of his fellow-creatures ?

In spite, however, of every precaution, Bahā'u'llāh could not long remain unnoticed. The news soon spread that a young Shaikh, possessed of marvellous knowledge, had retired to Kurdistān, and from all sides people came to consult and converse with him about those inexhaustible metaphysical and theological problems in which the East is so much interested. Gradually the rumour spread

to Baghdād ; and his family and friends felt no doubt that it referred to him for whose departure they were grieving. In all haste emissaries were sent to describe to him the lamentable state in which his absence left the community deprived of his counsel, and to beseech him to return.

He came back from Sulaimānyiah, and set about giving to the Babis the moral direction they so much needed. He brought back with him from his retreat the conception, henceforth fixed, of the great principles which were to be the basis of the religion he wished to restore, as well as a work entitled "The Book of Certainty,"¹ written by him in reply to a relative of the Bāb, who had asked him

¹ *Kitābu'l Iqān*. Cp. the English translation by 'Ali Kuli Khan and H. Mac Nutt (New York : G. V. Blackburne Co., 1904) :

what was meant by the proclamation of the young Prophet who had just been martyred at Tabriz. In this work, of which the interest is still increased by the fact that in it Bahā'u'llāh does not yet speak from the standpoint of his new claim as he does in subsequent writings, but only as a disciple of the Bāb, we see what constitutes the prophetic character. A curious interpretation of certain passages of the Old and New Testament, of the Qur'ān and of the Ḥadīths, shows us how all the Prophets can be considered as one, inasmuch as they all manifest to a special degree the Divine Spirit which animates them; and, more especially from the Musulman point of view, how the coming of the Bāb is clearly announced by all the apocalyptic prophecies of Islam. How-

ever, in certain pages of the book, as for instance in the concluding mystic lines,¹ the initiated could read that the time was near when Bahā'u'llāh himself would announce to the world the mission with which he was charged.

Besides this, his return amongst his own people quickly produced happy results. At first the Babis, having returned to a life of conformity, gradually began to devote themselves to a fruitful activity which was unknown to them for many years. Then, as is always the consequence in like cases, the courage which they had shown in the moment of trial, and the good fortune which now seemed to smile

¹ "Revealed by the 'Ba' and the 'Ha,' and peace be upon those who hear the melody of the Holy Dove on the Sadra'ti'l-Muntahā. Glory be to our Lord, the Most High !"

on them, continually attracted, even from the most remote corners of Asia, new adepts, who formed, in the country, a most imposing party around Bahā'u'llāh. The Shiite clergy was stirred up by it, and the great Mudjtahid of Karbala, Ḥādījī Mīrzā Djawād, did not rest till he had persuaded the Persian consul at Baghdād that this community was not only a peril to religion, but that, being so near the Iranian frontiers, it endangered the Empire itself, and that it was his duty to apprise his government of it. Then a long correspondence ensued, from 1861 to 1862, between the consul on the one side, the Governor of Kirmānshāh ¹ and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nāṣiru'd-Dīn-Shah on the other ;

¹ The province of Kirmānshāh is the nearest to 'Iraq 'Arabi, in which Baghdād is situated.

and soon the governments of Tihṙān and of Constantinople were led to consider the remedies that such a situation required.

These were the two : that they were either to give up Bahā'u'llāh to the Governor of Kirmānshāh—in which case Persia would be responsible for him—or else, by transferring him to a more distant place, prevent him from any longer disturbing the peace of Iran. The Shah's government, of course, was inclined to the first solution, which appeared more radical. But the Sultan did not believe in giving up an exile who had the right of protection on Ottoman soil. In spite of the good understanding existing between the two States, 'Abdul 'Aziz felt rather satisfied not to be obliged to suppress too brutally a movement which

he considered especially a peril to the abhorred Shiism; he decided to call Bahā'u'llāh to Constantinople, where, it was said, it would be easier to watch his doings. He therefore sent to inform the Governor of Baghdād of the decision which had just been taken with reference to the notorious exile.

THE DECLARATION OF THE RIZWĀN

THUS, after a few years of relative peace, the Babis were again to know all kinds of trials brought about by this new exile : the hostility of the officials towards those no longer under royal protection ; material losses caused by the hasty abandonment of various enterprises by means of which they were beginning to rebuild their fortunes ; the uncertainty of the morrow, and the extenuating fatigues of the journey painfully undertaken by women and children. The flitting ray of sunshine which had shone on their destiny was already veiled by

gathering storm-clouds. Nevertheless, no one hesitated, and all those who had come from Tih^rān with Bahā'u'llāh besought him not to leave them behind, as they felt incapable of facing the deprivations they would incur by the absence of his presence and sustaining influence. He then appointed to meet them some farsakhs from Bagh^dād, on an estate known under the name of the "Garden of the Riẓwān," belonging to Nadjib Pacha, former governor of the town, who had invited the celebrated exile to stay there for some time before starting. In the East, the first stage of a journey is always rendered very tedious by the numerable preparatives that the setting out of a cavarān requires. Custom decrees that on the first day the travellers

go but a short distance, stopping at the first resting-place, in order to give the late-comers time to catch them up. All the Baghdād authorities came to this garden to visit Bahā'u'llāh, and to show him, not only the high admiration in which he was held, but also that the fresh measures taken against him in no way alienated the sympathies which he had inspired.

It was during the twelve days spent by the Babis in the Garden of the Rizwān that the event was accomplished which was to give to their Cause a new signification and an import that only some few of the initiated had been able to anticipate. It was there, in fact, that Bahā'u'llāh announced to all his adepts that which eleven years previously he had revealed to those

intimates on whose judgment and sincerity he so completely relied, that he it was whose mission the Bāb had come to prophesy, pointing him out as the Supreme Manifestation of God, who was to complete the work begun by himself, and towards whom all should turn if they wished to obey his will.

It was on the evening of the very day they left Baghdād. The sun was about to set in the glowing sky of a warm spring day. The last arrivals had in their turn reached the Pacha's garden some hours ago, and, grouped around Bahā'u'llāh, they evoked—in fear of the uncertain future—the remembrance of all the sufferings that so many of them had borne for their faith, since the time that the glorified Bāb had shown them the way of salvation. Would

they all have strength to undergo the new trials that God would send them ? Who would lead them ? Who would protect the Babis now that Turkey in its turn was against them ? So in face of his troubled companions, Bahā'u'llāh understood that he ought no longer to delay the revelation of the role that he meant to assume under the direction of the Divine Will. Standing up in their midst, he told them that there was no time for looking backwards. With the same courage that they had hitherto displayed they were to face the veiled unknown, and think of still more glorious days, in the accomplishment of those laws which the Bāb had foretold. Let them no longer be afraid, but trust in him ! Henceforth there were no Babis, for a new leader was before

them to enroll them under his name ; if they had the courage to follow him, it was under the title of Bahais that they were to be ready to struggle and to suffer ! And in order to make them understand whither he was going to lead them, as well as the progress signified by this change of name, he immediately announced to them that the legal uncleanness of infidels was henceforth abolished. “ God, he told them, has made all men the drops of one sea, and the leaves of one tree, and all races pure.¹ Let us have noble

¹ Thus we find in the *Kitābū'l-Aqdas*, p. 28 (Bombay edition) : “ God has withdrawn the order of impurity from all things and foreign peoples ; it is a favour of God who is in reality the Pardoner, the Benevolent One. Everything was plunged in the Sea of Purity in the early days of the Rizwân where we were transfigured above the universe by our glorified Names and our supreme Attributes. . . . ”

thoughts, healthy morals and hygienic habits! From this moment let us be the example to guide all humanity towards its regeneration!" Did they think that the Bāb had been martyred at Tabriz solely that a few million oppressed Persians might escape the tyranny of the Mullās?—or even that the whole of Islam might rejoice in the coming of the Qā'im the annunciator of new times? Surely not; the Cause embraced by them was greater! Until now they had only accomplished one stage, they must go further! What was the use of all the religions in the world if people did not see the common bond which was uniting them behind the differences of dogmas and rites? The times were distant since Moses, Jesus or Muhammad had brought them special

laws. God would speak again, and this time, through His Supreme Manifestation, he would lead reconciled men toward progress, and regenerate them by love. Disdainful of the comforts of this world, they ought only to strive to develop their spirituality. Thus, the work begun by the Bāb would find in him its accomplishment and its end in the renovation and unification of all religions !

Some of them trembled hearing these unexpected words and foreseeing the import of the ideas therein contained, so far above their own. They felt that they would have to bid farewell to a past to which they were still attached by all they held dear, and they questioned themselves if they were really ready for that human society which was to be the object

of their mission. But the love with which Bahā'u'llāh inspired his companions, especially the confidence they had in his judgment which they had always believed to be inspired by God, overcame the greater part of their hesitations ; and when finally they left the neighbourhood of Baghdād, but with few exceptions the Babis had become Bahais, and a fresh page of their history was about to be opened and given to the world.

They proceeded towards Constantinople by way of Mosul and Samsun.

CONSTANTINOPLÉ

THE reception accorded to Bahā'u'llāh in the Ottoman capital was far more hospitable than that which could have been expected on account of the order which had forced him to leave Baghdād, or from the Shiite clergy themselves, through whose hostility it had been inspired. The government received him with those marks of particular veneration which, in the East, are shown to all those who have devoted themselves to the spiritual life. Houses were placed at the disposal of himself and his family, and soon the majority of the important persons in the town came to visit him.

His disciples found lucrative occupations and trades in the bazaar : many of them even became Ottoman subjects, hoping by this means to definitely escape the formidable ill-will of the Persian authorities. Strong in their liberty, they continued to such an extent to make converts around them, that the Shaikhu'l-Islam, uneasy at appearing to consent tacitly to the propagation of a movement which he could only consider as subversive, persuaded the Sultan to send Bahā'u'llāh still farther away from his native country, and to let him live in Adrianople on the northern frontiers of the Empire.

ADRIANOPOLE

BAHĀ'U'LLĀH had only remained four months at Constantinople, and at the end of 1864 he arrived at the capital of Eastern Rumelia, where he was to stay for nearly five years. He profited by this sojourn in Europe to enter into close relationship with the West, to which his mission had long been directed. There he drew up his famous *Ṣūratu'l-Mulūk*, containing letters to the sovereigns or ministers of state of Europe and America, which has been described and analysed by Baron Rosen in the *Bulletin de l'Institut Oriental de Saint-Petersbourg*,

and also by Professor E. G. Browne in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

He wrote to the Pope, to Queen Victoria, to the King of Prussia, to Napoleon III., etc., asking them for their co-operation in his effort to make his ideas of fraternity and universal peace triumph, by which the happiness and progress of the world were to be assured. This step was necessary : for it was time the ministers of state should abandon their negligence and their comfortable indolence, in order to think a little about their unhappy subjects, who were vegetating in misery and suffering. Kings, he said, are the representatives of God on earth, in so far as in them are to be found the divine attributes of power, strength and authority : consequently it is their duty

to make known the attributes of mercy, goodness and of providence, by watching over the moral education of the nations ! Let them arise then to proclaim aloud their adherence to the Divine Manifestation, which alone can assure the success of their reign and the prosperity of their countries. History does not tell us how some of these letters were received, but the prophecies therein contained have made them celebrated. Thus in 1868 he announced to Napoleon III. the approaching fall of his empire, and to the Pope the loss of his temporal power.

Thus, the leader of those few hundred Persians—who for the past twenty years had borne with the opprobrium and persecutions of the clergy and Governors of Islam—feeling himself strong enough,

and sufficiently imbued with the certainty of being the instrument chosen by God to spread His word, did not fear to address himself all at once, in the middle of the nineteenth century, to the Europe of Voltaire and of the Revolution. Events decided in his favour; not that the sovereigns whom he addressed answered to his call by leading their people to accept Bahaism, but because the ideas expressed by him responded to the contemporary attitude of mind, and therefore recruited adepts from amongst all those who were in any way interested in the progress of humanity. Since then, on the boundless field that he opened up to their generous activity, people of all religions—and even those who have never belonged to any Church—have been able

to unite in common effort towards upholding human fellowship.

Great encouragement, however, was not forthcoming from amongst the Persian community that had followed him from Baghdād. We have mentioned how, at the time of the proclamation of the Rizwān, a certain number of Babis—frightened at seeing their religion losing its purely Islamic character—hesitated in following Bahā'u'llāh in his work of unification. One of his stepbrothers, named Šobhī-Azal—who, in the Bāb's time, had held certain authority in the rising community, but who, since their exile, had never taken the least initiative, urged on by ambition to claim also a preponderant part in the affairs—grouped around himself a small number of con-

servatives who could not follow the evolution caused by Bahā'u'llāh's ideas. And in the very face of this ardent Bahaism which was courageously attempting the conquest of the world, he wished to represent what he considered to be the pure doctrine of the Bāb, and which he tried to spread by means of involved commentaries which more often obscured than elucidated the Master's thought.

His attempt was beforehand doomed to failure, in consequence of that law of nature which decrees that everything must progress, and that things only exist by incessantly evolving and perfecting themselves. Even amongst the Shiite Musulmans—of whom alone his band of followers was composed—he could not find the co-operation on which he had

counted, so greatly prolific had the seed of progressive aspiration become sown as it was by the Bāb himself in the minds of his compatriots. The inanity of his purpose soon became apparent. But his failure merely accentuated his hostility. Trying by a narrow interpretation of the words of the Bāb to show that the coming of "Him whom God would manifest" was premature, he denounced Bahā'u'llāh to the Sultan, for pursuing a personal object, and of fostering against the Ottoman Government designs imperilling its safety. But he simply succeeded in drawing upon himself and his brother the severity of the authorities, who up to now had been friendly; and the Sultan, without seeking to know the exact truth of the case, decided once more to change the

place of residence of the exiles, and ordered that Bahā'u'llāh should be imprisoned at 'Akkā, while Šobhī-Azal was to be supervised at Famagusta in Cyprus.

There it was that the poor ambitious man looked helplessly on the failure of his plans. When Cyprus fell into the hands of the English he recovered his liberty, but the number of his followers did not consequently increase. Up to the present day, pensioned by England, which has undertaken the support of the Sultan's former prisoner, he is no more than the leader of a few hundred conservative Babis whose influence has never become appreciable in the world.

‘AKKĀ

THE destiny of Bahā‘u’llāh and of his Cause was to be quite otherwise. He arrived in ‘Akkā in the month of August 1868, after a journey of several months, which was only the beginning of the long martyrdom he endured till his death. ‘Akkā was then only a fortress of Syria, the headquarters of an army corps, and reputed for the insalubrity of its climate, whither the government sent those political prisoners of whom it wished to rid itself. Everything led to the presumption, or rather the certainty, that Bahā‘u’llāh and his faithful disciples, who could not be persuaded to leave him, could not long

resist the severity of the climate of the town, and the sufferings in the dungeons of the fortress, exhausted as they were by the fatigues of the nomadic life they had been leading for years. The instructions given by the government to the officials charged with their custody were, besides, most severe. All of them were locked up pell-mell in one or two rooms in the barracks, and there they existed during long months, in the most painful and promiscuous manner, feeding themselves as best they could, and helplessly witnessing the mortality which decimated their ranks. But their faith in Him whom they had been following from Tih-rān ; the joy they experienced in suffering for the Cause ; the need they felt of dying in his service were so great, that those of them still

living speak of those times as of the only really happy days they have ever known. They lived constantly in Bahā‘u’llāh’s presence ; they heard his inspired words ; they knew they were the lieutenants of Him who was to conquer the world of ignorance and superstition ; on the other hand, what mattered the briny water that was given them to drink, the vermin which devoured them, the little ones who were dying of hunger ! Not a single complaint did they utter ; so patient were they that their very keepers became less obdurate. Thus they could communicate a little with the outside world and ameliorate their situation, till the day when the Sultan—remembering that these Persians were guilty of no other crime than that of joining one of their compatriots in exile, who

himself had done nothing against the laws of the Empire—ordered them to be set free, on condition however that they should not leave 'Akkā.

Bahā'u'llāh settled down with his family in the house assigned to him as a residence, while the other liberated Persians, once more setting courageously to work, endeavoured to emerge from the material distress into which they had fallen. Thanks to their honesty, which gave to the local population the desire to have dealings with them ; thanks also to their faith, which did not allow them to doubt of success, their position soon improved ; and the little Persian colony augmented by new-comers from the East: Buddhists, Parsees or Musulmans, wishing to know for themselves the new Manifestation,

whose renown was daily on the increase. One has not often, I think, had the opportunity of observing an economic and social phenomenon such as this little community, composed as it was of individuals belonging to the most diverse and equally fanatical religions, having up to this time lived in the most different surroundings, accustomed to conceptions of existence often contradictory ; and who had now come to carry into action the principles of detachment and of human fraternity, around the Prophet himself, which until then they had been powerless to realise in their native land. Their conduct was so perfect, their morality so high, their harmony so complete, that, although they have been there for forty years, no judge has had yet to intervene for them in any legal disputes.

The early Christian churches, in which however some difference of opinion made their way, can alone give us an idea of what the life of this Bahai community at 'Akkā has been since its commencement.

And those who have had the good fortune to be able to see it from near, will long retain the remembrance of the meetings at which they have been present, and in which believers from all Asiatic countries fraternise joyfully at their reconciliation with their European and American brothers, on the ground of the "creed" which till then had rendered them enemies.

The Cause indeed progressed rapidly. From 1869 to 1892, through periods of alternative kindness and severity on the part of the local authorities, and according to the often interested instructions of the

Wali of Beirut, or the orders from Constantinople, Bahā‘u’llāh employed all his time in writing the greater part of his doctrinal works. Up to this point, except the *Book of Iqān* written by him at Baghdād, he had only spread his teaching by means of letters to his distant disciples and to those who applied to him for the solution of metaphysical or ethical problems. Now, under the form of short treatises dictated to those around him, especially to his sons, he brought to light the principles of morals and of sociology which were to be the rules of the future city, and to lead man towards a new stage of progress. Amongst these are to be found *The Most Holy Book*, *The Book of the Testament*, etc., and many other writings. Thus sometimes in the

language of orthodoxy — either Christian or Musulman—sometimes in that of the Sufis or of the Free Thinkers, he edicts the principles which should serve to develop the individual to the profit of society.

‘ABDU’L-BAHĀ

BAHĀ‘U’LLĀH had no disciples more zealous, more helpful or more faithful in his work, than his eldest son ‘Abdu’l-Bahā-‘Abbās. Born at Tihirān on the 23rd of May 1844, the same day that the Bāb had declared his mission, he had constantly been with his father, sharing his sufferings since his earliest childhood, also profiting more than all the others by the marvellous power which emanated from Bahā‘u’llāh’s person. Endowed with a captivating charm, with an eloquence which made his conversation sought after by even his most irreducible adversaries, he joined to the indomitable energy inherited from his

father quite a personal gentleness, combined with that particular tact sometimes possessed by Orientals, and which straight away makes them equal to any situation. With the son of Bahā'u'llāh these qualities, united to the power of self-mastery which, according to J. J. Rousseau, can alone render us master of others, have made of him both one of the strongest and at the same time most seductive mentalities that can be imagined. His unique intelligence is capable of seizing at the first glance all the aspects of a question, and without hesitation seeing its solution; his heart attracts all the disinherited of life, who feel themselves instinctively drawn towards him.

Without entering into the smallest details of the life of the Bahais since the

days at Baghdād, it would be impossible to indicate the different circumstances in which he distinguished himself. Either it was necessary in the course of successive exiles, in order to spare his father fresh suffering, to undertake opportune interventions with the authorities ; or else during the calmer life of the latter times at ‘Akkā to write from dictation the long treatises which he revealed to the world ; or to clear up a difficulty existing with the fanatical Musulmans, recourse was had to his diplomacy. His indefatigable energy, ever ready to be of service, as much to the small as to the great, to friends as to strangers, was the living symbol of the name he had chosen, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, the Servant of Bahā. Accordingly he was designated in the *Book of the Testa-*

*ment*¹ to take the head of the movement on the death of Bahā'ū'llāh.

This event took place on the 29th of May 1892. From that time on, 'Abdu'l-Bahā has always been kept a prisoner within the walls of 'Akkā until quite recently, when the Sultan 'Abdu'l-Hamīd, re-establishing for his people the constitution of 1876, set free all the political prisoners of the Empire. But nevertheless he has spread his father's Cause to a most unexpected extent, especially if we consider the absolute absence of any organisation of propaganda properly so-called, and the inadequate means of action given the position of the Bahais in Syria.

Without it being always possible to re-

¹ One of the writings of Bahā'ū'llāh in which he indicates what steps the Bahais should take after his death.

trace the point of departure of the movement in each country, nevertheless, especially since 1892, in almost all the large towns of Europe and America, groups have been formed for the propagation of the ideas of liberalism and religious unification represented by Bahaism. Some of their members have been at ‘Akkā to receive from the Master himself, and from the spectacle of life led around him by the little Bahai community, the great teaching which later on they wish others to profit by. Those who have been unable to make the long pilgrimage have entered into correspondence with ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, and so to precisely collect his opinions on the most diverse circumstances of life. Thus he is effectively the centre of this great movement, which, having started from

the Persian mountains, to-day reunites people from all corners of the earth in one unique aim—that of the progress of humanity.

The exile to 'Akkā has certainly counted for much in the rapid conquests made by Bahaism during the last few years in the Judo-Christian world. Numerous indeed are the prophecies in the Old or New Testament which point out the Holy Land as the place of future Manifestations, and the Door of Hope for humanity. Since the day when the Sultan sent Bahā'u'llāh to reside in "The White City by the Sea," in front of Mount Carmel, Bahaism was no longer only presented to the Christians of the West as a reform of Christianity, but as the unexpected accomplishment of so many prophecies not

understood till then.¹ And from the pen of the Manifestation flowed a new interpretation which, for the faithful, broke away the seals which till then had kept the signification of the Holy Books hidden.

The new biblical exegesis, as also the quranic or avestic exegesis which thus is seen in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh and the commentaries of 'Abdu'l-Bahā, is certainly one of the most curious sides of Bahaism. Besides, they have justified

¹ The history of the German colonies of Jaffa, Jerusalem and Caifa is in this respect curious enough. They were founded towards 1860 by people from Wurtemberg who followed in voluntary exile their pastor, Ch. Hofmann: This latter had announced to them that the time fixed by Christ for His return had arrived; that he found the proof of it in the words of Jesus reported in the Gospel, and that meanwhile it was necessary to found the Kingdom of God in the Holy Land. An analogous sect, that of the Millerites in America, since 1844 is expecting the second coming of Christ.

the appearance of quite a special literature whose influence cannot be denied, and which merits profound study in itself alone.

However, it is not with this aspect of Bahaism that we here wish to occupy ourselves. We refer rather to special works¹ for those who wish to investigate how Bahaism presents itself as the accomplishment of apocalyptical prophecies of Jews and of Christians; and, placing ourselves on ground less high perhaps, but more within the reach of all, and certainly of a more immediate utility, try to show how, from the social point of view, it appears as the synthesis of the most

¹ See amongst others: *The Bahai Proofs*, by Mirza-Abu'l-Fazl (The J. W. Pratt Co., printers, New York, 1902). *The Book of Iqân; Some Answered Questions*, etc.

elevated principles on which the future evolution of humanity can be founded.

This will be the object of the second part of this study.

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PART II

SOCIAL IMPORT OF BAHAIISM

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THE TRUE RELIGION

“To live the life is :

“To be no cause of grief to anyone, to love each other truly.

“To be kind to all people, and to love them with a pure spirit.

“Should opposition or injury happen to us, we must bear it and be as kind as we can be, and above all, we must *love the people*.

“Should the utmost calamity happen to us, we must rejoice, for these things are the Gifts of God.

“To be silent concerning the faults of others, to pray for them, and help them, through kindness, to correct their faults.

“To look always at goodness and not at evil. If a man has ten good qualities and one bad one, we must look at the ten and forget the one : and if a man has ten bad qualities and one good one, we must look at the one and forget the ten.

“To never allow ourselves to speak an unkind word about another, even though that other be our enemy.

“To rebuke those who speak to us of the faults of others.

“All our deeds must be done to promote the welfare and happiness of others.

“To be occupied in spreading the teachings, for only through obedience to this command will we receive the power and confirmation of the Spirit.

“To detach our hearts from ourselves and from the world.

“To be humble.

“To be the servants of each other, and to comprehend that we are less than our fellow-creatures.

“To be as one soul in many bodies ; for the more we love each other the nearer we will be to God ; and our love, our unity, our obedience, must not be in word only but in reality.

“To act with cautiousness and wisdom.

“To be truthful.

“To be hospitable.

“To respect the rights of others.

“To be a cause of healing for the sick ; a comforter to the sorrowful ; a heavenly table for the hungry ; a guide to the erring ; rain for cultivation ; a star for every horizon ; a light in darkness ; a

herald to all those waiting for the Kingdom of God."

These words in their imposing simplicity dispense with all commentary.

Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahā expressed himself when wishing to make known to one of his disciples what constituted the true religion. It has been said that Bahaism is less a belief than a manner of life. It is unquestionably a religion, in the most exact sense of the word; we should be even tempted to add that it is pre-eminently The Religion, for it is the most wonderful means of international union known to us.

Let no one think that it is only at 'Akkā that these sentiments of real fraternity are manifested among the believers, and that, once away from the Master's influence,

they return to their racial prejudices and hatreds. We have seen, in the very heart of Burma, Bahai communities composed of members of all sects and castes which abound in India, to whom were joined without mental reservation Europeans residing in the country ; and there existed between these people the most sincere fraternity who previously would not have sat down at the same table. Similarly in Europe, in our large towns, where snobbism and prejudice have raised up between the different classes barriers as impassable as those due to Indian customs, the Bahai communities endeavour to follow in all respects the exhortations of 'Abdu'l-Bahā.

One must admit that there is there much more than the expression of vague

sentimentality or of convent morality ; in those lines are to be found the principles indispensable to the existence of societies, the recognition and putting into practice of that fellowship which unites us to our neighbour and which should make us look upon him with the love we have for our brother. Is there any other remedy than this for the many evils from which we suffer ? Socialist politicians, who commend the general strike as the only means of hastening the coming of the future city, which they are dreaming of, do not they also presuppose this love which alone can obtain from the working classes that detachment and disinterestedness required by such a manifestation ? Now, who does not see that if such a fellowship, such a love, existed on earth, none of the

questions that socialism wishes to decide would arise ?

It is, then, this love that before all things should prevail between the different classes of one society ; between the hostile races of one nation ; between all people in the world, in order that the greater part of the evils afflicting humanity may disappear.

This is the task Bahaism claims to fulfil. But in order to be able to judge its merits and its efficacy, at least with reference to our Western world, it is important to examine—by extracting from the writings of Bahā'u'llāh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahā the teachings they can give us—how religion acts on the life of a nation, and the influence it can have on man taken individually ; on society ; and on the state.

With the progress of the centuries,

religion has seen its domain restricted, and philosophy, as well as a crowd of sciences (in the order of nature, history, law, sociology, policy, etc.), which formerly were taught in the churches, have now taken a specific form, leaving to revelation the mere field—yet without limits—of the relations between God and man. In our time a religious system should be considered, not only in its effects on the mystic soul of the believer, but even as every other social phenomena—in its effects upon the general activity of a nation. Let us then see from these different points of view what Bahā'u'llāh teaches.

BAHAISM AND THE STATE

THE separation of Church and State can only be temporary—a momentary stage in the march of societies. If, at a time when the sovereign did not affiliate the spiritual and temporary power under his sway, history shows us that with the old sectarian religions the State has seen the formidable power of the Church (with which it has had to reckon and sometimes to struggle) take shape in face of it, and often against it, it could not be thus then in the future city founded on Bahai principles. The absence of all religious ceremonies, and consequently of the clergy and priestly hierarchy, does not

admit of there ever being a question of separation of Church and State. In the same way a government advocating liberty, and careful to respect the creeds of all, will not, as now,¹ have to take up an atheistical position nor confine itself within the vaguer limits of non-religion.

In the presence of religious unity, the State will be religious; not that it must give to all its acts a mystical appearance, which could not be in keeping with their material object, nor even recall to its subjects — by coining its gold or by stamping its banknotes — the special protection granted by God to their country. But, religion being put into practice in all acts of life, from the minister of State down to the humblest official, each one

¹ In France.

will be penetrated by the sacred character of his responsibility and of his mission which he is bound to fulfil in conformity with divine law. Thus each one, in his own way, working at his own welfare, will become the instrument of the general development of the whole.

But Bahaism is not merely an idealist theory ; it is also, as we have seen, a practical instrument, made for the present age ; and as such it has to be preoccupied with the relationship between the different existing religions and the State. The great principle which, in these conditions, dominates the whole question is naturally that of the absolute separation of the two domains—the spiritual from the temporal.

As long as the ancient religions and

their clergy exist, the priest must never under any pretext be occupied in politics, and the State must never meddle with religious questions.

“I swear to you before God ! it is not of your kingdoms we wish to dispose, but we have come to dispose of your hearts : most certainly this is the aim of Bahā,”¹ this is written in the *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, the Most Holy Book, which is considered as the principal work of Bahā'u'llāh. The governments, therefore, could in no way fear the influence of Bahaism, which cannot, by its very principles, become the doctrine of a political party. In a more recent work entitled “Politics,” and written specially for the East, ‘Abdu'l-Bahā, explaining the history of Turkey

¹ *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, p. 30 (Bombay edition).

and Persia, shows how all the misfortunes which, in the course of the last century, have weighed upon these two countries, have always had as the initiatory cause the unjustifiable interference of the priests in the political affairs of the country. He points out how the administration of a government penetrated by a sense of its duties is as necessary for a country as the moral direction which it derives from the religious idea, and how that the two authorities should under no pretext whatsoever encroach on one another's prerogatives.

Kings and ministers of State have a supreme mission here below, entitling them to the respect and devotion of their subjects. They are the "Day-springs of the Power and Dawning-places of the

Authority of God.”¹ That is to say, that in them is manifested to men one of the Divine Attributes — power. In virtue of this, as trustees of this attribute, they have a right to the obedience of their subjects; but this divine right, in some way, which justifies their high position, equally imposes upon them sacred duties.

In order to be obeyed they should govern with equity: but it is especially their mission to establish on earth the Universal Peace, that Peace which Bahā‘u’llāh came to give to the heart of Man.

¹ Bahā‘u’llāh, *Tablet of Ishrāqāt*, p. 34 (Chicago, 1908).

UNIVERSAL PEACE

THERE are two means of attaining this : by the adoption of an international language, and the creation of tribunals of arbitration to regulate difficulties pending between nations.

In the *Kitābu'l-Āqdas* as well as in a number of his earlier and later writings, Bahā'u'llāh exhorts the ministers of State to come to an agreement as to the employment of a universal language and writing, either by choosing one from amongst those already existing, or else by creating one artificially. By this means, international relations being facilitated, people will learn to know one another

better, and consequently to love one another.

The institution of tribunals of arbitration to suppress the causes which determine war between nations, is connected with the prerogatives of a special Council called Baïtu'l-'Adl, or House of Justice, about which we shall speak later on.

However, it is important to note that—long before these ideas had taken form amongst us, long before the protagonists of the international auxiliary language had recruited adepts from amongst all civilised nations, more than twenty years before the Czar had thought of assembling the first Hague Conference, at a time when the Bāb himself had sometimes excused the use of arms for the propagation of

religion—Bahā'ū'llāh had made these high principles the one basis of his dispensation.

“We have commanded the Most Great Peace, which is the greatest means for the protection of mankind. The rulers of the world must, in one accord, adhere to this command which is the main cause for the tranquillity and security of the world.”¹

The Bahais have carried obedience to this principle so far—remembering that their Prophet had said: “It is better for you to be killed than to kill”—that the fanatical population of Persia, excited by its Mullās, has been able at different times during the last few years, to make odious attacks against them, without their even

¹ Bahā'ū'llāh, *Tablet of Ishrāqāt*, p. 34.

wishing to take up arms in self-defence, although often they had a numerical advantage. It is alone this attitude of the Bahais which has put an end to the terrible religious wars which up to 1852 stained Persia with blood.

This universal peace has besides been the aim of Bahā'u'llāh all his life ; he incessantly returns to this point :

“ . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers ; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened ; . . . what harm is there in this ? . . . Yet so it shall be ; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the ‘ Most Great Peace ’ shall come. . . . ”¹

¹ Cp. E. G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 40.

Thus he spoke in the month of April 1890, two years before his death, to Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge University, who had come to see him in prison at 'Akkā.

This peace between the nations is not all. It should coincide with internal peace and prosperity, when the struggle between classes will cease, and when State administration will be confided to competent agents.

“The fifth Ishrāq (effulgence) is that governments must be acquainted with the conditions (or deserts) of the officials, and must confer upon them dignity and positions in accord with (men's) due measure and merit. To have regard for this matter is obligatory and incumbent on every chief and ruler. Thus

perchance, traitors shall not usurp the place of trustworthy men, or spoilers occupy the seat of guardians.”¹

Do we not see there the essential though oft disregarded rule which—to the exclusion of every other consideration—should preside over the nomination of officials?

“O people of God!—exalted be His Glory!—Ask God to guard the sources of power and authority [rulers *et al.*] against the evil of egotism and lust, and to illumine them with the lights of justice and guidance.”²

Although these principles can be put into practice in all countries, and under all rules, it appears by the perusal of these books that, in Bahā‘u’llāh’s judgment

¹ Bahā‘u’llāh, *Tablet of Ishrāqāt*, p. 35.

² *Words of Paradise*, p. 50 (Chicago, 1906).

the form of government best adapted for these conditions, to assure to nations the benefits of peace externally and of prosperity internally, is a Constitutional Monarchy with a Representative Parliament. Thus the advantages of wise deliberation would be added to those which result from responsible authority.

In a letter written to Queen Victoria in the early days of 'Akkā, Bahā'u'llāh congratulates her on her submission to the decision of Parliament.

“ Thereby the basis of the edifices of affairs is made firm, and the hearts of those who are under thy shadow (*i.e.* protection), both high and low, are made tranquil. But it behoves them¹ to be

¹ Alludes to the system of Representative Government.

(as) trustees among the servants (of God), and to regard themselves as guardians over whomsoever is in all the earth."

And farther on :

"We ask God that He will help the Kings to be at peace : verily He is able to do what He willeth. O assembly of Kings ! Verily we see you increasing your expenditure every year, and placing the burden (thereof) on your subjects : this is nought but manifest injustice. Fear ye the sighs of the oppressed and his tears, and do not burden your subjects above that which they can bear, neither ruin them to build up your places. Choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves : thus do we expound unto

you that which will profit you, if ye are
of those who enquire.”¹

¹ *Ṣūratu'l-Molūk*. Cp. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xxi. (New Series), pp. 969, etc.

BAHAISM AND SOCIETY—THE BAÏTÜ'L-'ADL

THOSE who have only known the history of this movement through the ignorant or partial accounts of Musulman writers, have sometimes allowed it to be understood that the Bahai society—or rather the Babi society, which alone has attracted their investigation—has shown marked tendencies towards communism, and, in short, is merely an anarchist sect. In the very face of the abnegation of the martyrs who, without calculation, sacrificed their worldly goods before shedding their blood for the Cause ; in the very face of the generous enthusiasm which made

them treat as brothers those who entered their ranks, calumny soon misrepresented acts of most noble fellowship, and even attributed to them motives that morality could no longer approve of.

Now, if Bahaism teaches us not to be attached to the things of this world, it insists just as much on the legitimacy of individual property, which alone can assure the progress of societies. Moreover, far from sympathising with anarchical theories, it has always imposed upon believers, as a first duty, respect for the laws and customs of each country. A better example of the way in which this essential principle is followed could not be given than by showing the attitude adopted by the Bahai Musulman women in the question of the veil. It is known

that the Bāb himself—explaining to his disciples that in Muhammad's judgment only the wives of the Prophet had received the order to hide the face—had relieved the believers from the painful restraint of the veil. Now, since Bahā'u'llāh has made respect for customs an essential obligation, we see women in Persia, Egypt, Syria, continuing to follow a custom the sudden abandonment of which would profitlessly risk scandalising the population in whose midst they live; and that, although personally they have no sympathy with an ancient custom which they find exceedingly inconvenient. This detail, of little importance in itself, is, however, significant in as far as it denotes a spirit diametrically opposed to anarchist tendencies.

Besides, with regard to a government understanding its mission in the manner we have just explained, the first duty of subjects is the observation of the laws, and an avowed respect for established authority. Thus well-regulated societies are formed, in which executive and legislative power combine to produce progressively the necessary reforms; there will be no more need, then, to fear the tyranny of autocracy, than the excesses of demagogism.

“The third Ishrāq commands the executing of the laws, for this is the primary means for the maintenance of the world. The Heaven of Divine Wisdom is illumined and shining with two orbs—Consultation and Kindness. And the tent of the order of the World

is hoisted and established on two pillars

—Reward and Retribution.”¹

The administration of the Bahai society is entrusted to an organ created by Bahā‘u’llāh and bearing the name of Baïtu’l-‘Adl, or House of Justice, whose constitution for each town is ordered by the *Kitābu’l-Āqdas*. The rules fixing its province, the spirit which should preside over its deliberations and its acts, make it the instrument essential for the propagation of Bahai principles in the world.

“God has imposed on every town the erection of a Baïtu’l-‘Adl where men are to assemble according to the number of Bahā ;² (if they surpass this number it

¹ Bahā‘u’llāh, *Tablet of Ishrūqāt*, p. 34.

² The value of Bahā, according to the “Ābdjad” notation, is 9.

matters little). They should figure to themselves that they are in God's presence, and see what is invisible. They should be divine agents in the casual world, the representatives of God for those who are on earth, and defend for love of God the interests of His servants as they would defend their own." Thus the *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*¹ expresses itself.

In each Bahai community the members will elect, then, a council of at least nine members chosen from among the worthiest of them, who will be entrusted to take in hand the social interests of the community as well as those of individuals. Whether it be a question of material difficulties between the believers, or of interpretation on a point of doctrine, or else a question

¹ *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, loc. cit. p. 11.

of protecting minors, and incapable persons, it is on this council that the responsibility will rest.

Passages regulating its prerogatives are very numerous, and we shall see that this term of Bāitu'l-'Adl, in Bahā'u'llāh's judgment, is not only applicable to a kind of family council similar to the one of which we have just spoken, but much rather is it a generic name designating especially the sacred character which, in the Bahai society, all legislative and administrative councils should assume.

“The Men of the House of Justice of God (Bāitu'l-'Adl) must, night and day, gaze toward that which hath been revealed from the horizon of the Heaven of the Supreme Pen for the training of the servants (people), for the upbuilding

of countries, for the protection of men and for the preservation of (human) honour."

This passage, as we see, is very broad. It imposes on the Council, as its principal department in the city, the care of superintending education. The works of Bahā'u'llāh and the instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahā cannot leave the least doubt in our minds as to the importance attached by Bahaism to the education question. Whilst religions, up to the present, have more or less deservedly been accused of being anti-educational; whilst none of them have entirely liberated reason from the fetters of dogma, Bahaism, on the contrary, teaches that man can only approach God, by first

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablet of Ishrāqāt*, p. 33.

developing his intellectual faculties, which will permit him to take his share in the amount of knowledge acquired by past centuries. Thus he will be able to read the "Book of Nature" and find—thanks not only to the teaching of the inspired Masters, but also to the effort of introspection—the great moral and spiritual truths which reveal the divine. Man has not justified his superior position in the scale of nature, nor developed his individuality, till he has attained this stage of his evolution. Therefore the first duty of parents is to give to their children as complete an instruction as possible: this duty is identical for boys or girls.

"A father is commanded to bring up his son or daughter by science and

letters, and all which the Tablet enjoins. Should anyone neglect what has been inculcated, the agents of the Baġtu'l-'Adl order him, if rich, to pay the amount necessary for his education. Or else the expenses devolve upon the Baġtu'l-'Adl which we have made a refuge for the poor and homeless." ¹

The importance attached by Bahā'u'l-lāh to the mission of educator is still recognised, in that the *Kitābu'l-Āqdas* ranks the latter amongst the number of those called to receive the succession *ab intestato*.² He who gave us instruction gave us intellectual life: he has a right to a place in our affection and respect, a fact up to the present too often disregarded;

¹ *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, loc. cit. p. 18.

² *Ibid.* p. 9.

giving him hereditary rights, Bahaism creates an innovation that future legislation would do well to adopt.

‘Abdu’l-Bahā likewise constantly returns to this point in his letters addressed to the believers of all countries. He especially insists upon the necessity of teaching girls, not only because it is instruction alone that will free the Eastern woman from her terrible inert condition in the Islamic harims or the Brahmanic zananas, but because—even in our Western countries, women too often receive an insufficient amount of instruction to be of any use in preparing them to fulfil their duty in life. Is not the mother man’s first educator? Who will deny the influence of early principles impressed on a child’s soul later on in life? How can we expect a more

perfect civilisation if the half of mankind remains in the darkness of ignorance ?

No one doubts, moreover, the considerable influence that can in the future be exercised by women for the triumph of ideas which until now have come to nothing, but which are essential for the progress of societies. The majority of sociologists recognise the fact that the struggle against war, alcoholism, indifferent labour organisation, and in general all the misfortunes which decimate humanity, will only bear fruit when women will be prepared for combat.

Is it necessary to state that it is not only a question of instruction properly so-called, and that it could not suffice to inculcate the child with the most diverse notions of all sciences within his reach ? We must

especially form his morals, teach him to know his own mind, to be conscious of himself and of his dignity, show him how the development of society is intimately bound up with his own personal development, for he is merely a link in the infinite chain of creation. Too often the shocks that agitate humanity, hindering it in the way of progress, are only brought about by this want of moral education which prevents man from turning to account the knowledge he has acquired without being able to assimilate it correctly. Thus new scientific discoveries, modifying the conditions of existence, when mentalities have remained at the same point, sometimes produce painful social disturbances. It will specially be the religious side of instruction—without which, it would risk

being entirely corrupted—which will remedy this state of things.

“Schools must first train the children in the principles of Religion, so that the *Promise* and the *Threat*, recorded in the Books of God, may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments : but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.”¹

There is no fear of such a prescription, emanating from such an authority, ever running the risk of being disregarded ; or of generations instructed in Bahaism ever falling into fanatical excesses. Besides,

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Words of Paradise*, p. 53. Children should be taught the meaning of scriptural allegories so that they should not become fanatics.

the Bahai communities of the East have already, on several occasions, given proof of their moderation and liberalism.

The principal function of the Bāitu'l-'Adl, after the superintendence of education, is the protection of minors and of the incapable, as well as the directing of works of assistance.

“ We exhort the men [members] of the House of Justice, and command them to guard and protect the servants, maid servants and children. They must under all circumstances, have regard for the interests of the servants. Blessed is the prince who succours a captive, the rich one who favors the needy, the just man who secures the rights of a wronged one from the oppressor ! ”¹

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Words of Paradise*, p: 55.

This is certainly a most important province of the Baĭtu'l-'Adl, and one which perhaps shows most clearly to what extent Bahā'u'llāh was conscious of the needs of modern society. The considerable development accomplished by humanity during the last few centuries, from the intellectual and material standpoint, and the almost stationary state in which morality has remained during the same time, have as a first result placed the lower classes of society in a still more precarious condition. Hence the imperious necessity of protecting, more efficaciously than is possible by the present laws, all categories of incapacitated people or minors.

One of the most urgent social problems of the present day that our modern com-

munities have to deal with, is to stem the ever-increasing infantile criminality. It would seem that, at a time when precocity becomes a necessity in the struggle for existence, crime also has followed the general law. Accordingly committees for penal reform in the majority of civilised States are studying means for the remedy of such an order of things. The application, pure and simple, of the penalties of law not being recommendable in cases of criminal minors, we seem more and more to fall in with the institution of certain councils of tutelage, charged with withdrawing the child from the centre in which it has become a criminal, in order to place it in other surroundings, such as a family, school, institution or patronage,

where under the supervision of these Councils he will be educated and endued with the sense of restraint until the day he is capable of self-government and social duties.

This role is imparted to the Baġtu'l-'Adl, agent of the society in its educative mission, responsible for the protection of the community against the enemies of society. In order to satisfy justice it is not sufficient, in fact, to absolve as irresponsible those individuals who have been led to crime through youth, hereditary defects, or the influence of surroundings. Evil must be prevented in every possible way by quite a series of cautionary institutions. This is what 'Abdu'l-Bahā indicated so clearly in one of his conversations collected by Laura Clifford Barney

in the book we mentioned at the beginning of these pages.¹

After what we have just seen, it is clear that in the future civilisation, when Bahai ideas will have been universally accepted, the function of the Baïtu'l-'Adl, which is a kind of family council in the community, will have under its control almost the whole administration of the city, and that naturally it will take the place of our municipal councils. We cannot doubt, as we said above, that such has indeed been Bahā'u'llāh's intention. Further, in other passages of his works he clearly aims, not only at a municipal Baïtu'l-'Adl, but also at a legislative Baïtu'l-'Adl sitting as a national parliament, and especially at an international

¹ *Some Answered Questions*, loc. cit. ch. lxxvii.

Baītu'l-'Adl acting as a tribunal of arbitration. It is thus that in concurrence with the ministers of State the Baītu'l-'Adl should be preoccupied with the adoption of a universal language.

Further, "The affairs of the people are in charge of the Men of the Baītu'l-'Adl. They are the trustees of God among His servants and the sources of command in His countries. O people of God, the trainer of the world is Justice, for it consists of two pillars, Reward and Retribution. These two pillars are two fountains for the life of the people of the world. Inasmuch as for each day and time a particular decree or order is expedient, affairs are therefore entrusted to the Baītu'l-'Adl so that it may execute that which it deems advisable at the time. Administrative affairs

are all in charge of the Baïtu'l-'Adl, and religious questions depend upon that which has been revealed in the Book."¹

The few passages we have just quoted serve to show all the importance that the Baïtu'l-'Adl will have in the Bahai city. The *Kitābu'l-Āqdas* likewise establishes what the financial resources will be which will permit it to accomplish its task.² Besides what voluntary donations it may receive, one of its revenues will consist in the property of those that die intestate and have no legal inheritors. The Bahai system of succession is characterised by a partition of the inheritance amongst the heirs, descendants and collaterals, ancestors and spouse, according to a fixed

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablet of Ishrāqāt*, p. 37.

² Cp. *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, loc. cit. p. 9:

proportion. When the *de cuius* dies without leaving a successor in one of the hereditary categories, the share of the missing successor goes by right to the Baĭtu'l-'Adl, which likewise receives successions by escheat. This will constitute an important part of the receipts, to which will be added—let us hope in a very modest proportion in a society founded on such principles—the product of fines, as well as a tax, paid once for all by each individual, of one-ninth of his capital, as his personal contribution to the expenses of the society.¹

There is another power, too, which, without assuming the official character of the power of the Government, or of the Baĭtu'l-'Adl, has none the less acquired

¹ Each increase of capital is naturally subject to this tax,

considerable influence in almost all Eastern countries, and, until lately, completely unsuspected. I wish to speak of the Press, which began by being merely a reflection of public opinion, but which soon became one of the most important factors of its formation. Successive events for some years in different Eastern countries bear witness to its influence, it being the same in all latitudes. Bahā'u'llāh could not help being preoccupied with such a power. At a glance he recognised all the harm that the Press could cause if not uniquely employed in the service of truth. When the masses are more anxious to find ready-made opinions than to take the trouble of forming their own, they are nearly always incapable of distinguishing the mark of sincerity. The Press—which gives

to all the news of the whole world, which spreads ideas and discoveries, which permits the interchange of thoughts between societies which are not in contact—would be a marvellous instrument of civilisation and union if its members could understand the elevated character of their mission.

“But it behoveth the writers thereof to be sanctified from the prejudice of egotism and desire and to be adorned with the ornament of Equity and Justice ; they must inquire into matters as much as possible, in order that they may be informed of the real facts, and commit the same to writing.”¹

A Press, following a similar method, would be the most active agent of the union between nations. Far from exciting

¹ Bahā'ū'llāh, *Tablet of Tarāzāt*, p: 11;

them against one another so as to serve some unknown obscure policy of private interests, it would contribute with all its might to the establishment of friendly international relations. It would adopt the exhortation of the *Words of Paradise*:

“Gaze unto Oneness, and hold fast unto the means which conduce to the tranquillity and security of the people of the whole world. This span-wide world is but one native land and one locality. . . . To the people of Bahā glory is in knowledge, good deeds, good morals and wisdom—not in native land or station.”¹

When societies will have become imbued with these principles, Bahaism will triumph: its one aim being to bring such reforms into the world. Not asking from its

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Words of Paradise*, p. 52.

adepts any solemn conversion, it can only prove the growth of its numbers by seeing its ideas spread more and more, and that which was the utopia of yesterday become the reality of to-morrow. Thus new relations will be daily established between the nations ; commercial interchange will be multiplied ; the savants of each country will truly collaborate with their colleagues in other countries, and communicate more freely their discoveries, and new inventions will no longer be used to perfect instruments of destruction. A better distribution of natural forces will allow each State to turn all its riches to account, and covetous and unfair competition will be replaced by fruitful emulation, under the protection of a peace that will no longer be troubled by risk of war.

BAHAISM AND THE INDIVIDUAL

LET us now examine the influence Bahaim can have on the individual in his personal life : for it is only through individual progress that we can hope to see the accomplishment of the progress of societies.

First of all, what will be the religious attitude of a Bahai ? In order to reply fully to this question, perhaps it would be necessary to examine successively what might be the religious conceptions of a Christian, Muhammadan, Buddhist, etc., of a Free-Thinker even, when an adept of one of these different beliefs accepts Bahaim. But that would lead us to

quite a series of theological digressions outside the restricted limits of this study.

It will suffice to state that each of these individuals, penetrated by this broad spirit of tolerance which characterises Bahā'u'llāh's doctrine, will see in it the contemporary form of the religious idea.

Keeping as much of his original belief as will agree with his broadened conception, he will take exact account of the place religion should fill in his life. No longer having the observance of liturgical exercises to rouse his negligence, or to satisfy his intimate aspirations, he will understand that all the acts of his life should express his high conceptions of the divine and tend to realise it in himself. Action will become his prayer; for the best way to make the infinite which is

in us rise to the Infinite which rules and surrounds us, is to communicate with it, and still more to work, endeavouring to act in no way contrary to the physical and moral harmony of the universe.

Bahaism, in fact, teaches us that, far from seeking to renounce this world and to withdraw into a spiritual domain where all material preoccupations are entirely suppressed, it is here below that we should develop, so as to attain to a higher spiritual condition. Our subsequent growth depends on the way we have profited by the time passed on this earth ; and as on this material earth we are physical beings as well as spiritual ones, it is by the appropriate use of all our faculties that we shall accomplish the perfecting of our soul. The mistake of

Buddhists in their deceptive and depressing Nirvana ; of Musulmans resigned to sterile fatalism ; of Christians themselves in their contempt for the comforts of this world ; of all those, in short, that the hope of a happier future hinders from recognising the beauties of the present, is not to have seen what a wonderful instrument of spiritual progress this material world is. Thus we have created arbitrary distinctions instead of realising that everything is divine, that spirit and matter are only separated from one another by our inability to seize simultaneously the two different aspects of one and the same thing, and that by voluntarily depriving ourselves of quite a category of phenomena we but delay the progress of our development.

Consequently, if it is well to be able to repress the demands of certain of our instincts; if it is sometimes useful in solitude to seek after conditions for the development of our mental and spiritual faculties, it is dependent on our wish to place, in a practical way, in this very world we live in, the strength thus acquired in the service of our own progress and that of our fellow-creatures. The mystic exaggerations of the yoghis, sufis, or monks are alike fatal.

“ A solitary life and severe discipline do not meet (God's) approval. The possessors of perception and knowledge should look unto the means which are conducive to joy and fragrance. Such practices come forth and proceed from the loins of

superstition and the womb of fancy, and are not worthy the people of knowledge.

. . . Deprive not yourself of that which is created for you.”¹

More recently, in this same order of ideas, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, writing to a Western believer, showed him that Bahaism is a religion of healthy and joyful life, a morality based on activity; and not a dogma of contrition, a sterile doctrine of renouncement: “We were made to be happy and not sad; for joy, not for sorrow. Happiness is life; sadness is death; spiritual happiness is eternal life! It is a light that the night does not extinguish; it is an honour that shame does not follow, an existence which is not resolved into annihilation! For happi-

¹ Bahā’u’llāh, *Words of Paradise*, p. 56.

ness the worlds and contingent beings have been created !”

To attain this happiness, it goes without saying it is not sufficient to give satisfaction to the plenitude of one's desires : man would too often risk being guided by his less noble instincts. Into whatever sphere his faculties, tastes, thoughts, reason lead him, he ought to be especially engrossed in placing his activity in the service of what is high and generous in his being, and so contribute with all his might to the general harmony of the world. That is the religious life which gives happiness, not in the retreat of a hermitage, but in the fruitful agitation of the world. There is the life indicated to us by reason, conscious of its place in the universe !

“Religion,” says Bahā‘u’llāh, “is the greatest instrument for the order of the world and the tranquillity of all existent beings.” And a little after he says: “The greatest gift and the highest blessing, is Wisdom. It is the protector of Existence, and its support and helper. Wisdom is the Messenger of the Merciful One, and the Manifestation of the (Divine) Name, the ‘All-Wise’,”¹ thus indicating that our legitimate aspirations towards that which some call the Unknowable should always remain under the control of reason; in short, preventing man being led by his faith into a domain where his reason could no longer follow it.

¹ Bahā‘u’llāh, *Words of Paradise*, pp. 49 and 51.

PATRIOTISM

WE said above that the two pillars on which Bahai sociology repose were Love and Work. We have likewise seen how this love is first manifested in the relations that the Bahai ought to maintain with different people, to whatever race or sect they may belong. This naturally leads us to examine what place the idea of fatherland holds in the doctrine of Bahā'u'llāh.

Up to now, few ideas have been more fruitful in generous acts, more sublime in self-sacrifice ; but, I fear, few also are responsible for so much blind fanaticism and fratricidal struggles. As, alas ! too

often is the case, generous ideas of the masses sometimes become, amongst unscrupulous individuals or interested minorities, too easy an instrument for the satisfaction of personal aims. So, in the *Tablet of Ishrāqāt* we find: "The most splendid fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is this exalted Word: Ye are all fruits of one tree and leaves of one branch. Glory is not his who loves his own country, but glory is his who loves his kind." ¹

What does this mean, if not that it is not sufficient to have this love of one's country which is instinctively in the heart of every man? to feel imperiously the need of defending one's native land against the dangers that may menace it, and

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablet of Ishrāqāt*, p. 36.

which, in short, is but one of the instinctive forms of self-preservation? Man worthy of the name ought to go further: he should feel a similar love for the whole world. It does by no means follow that because of that feeling he should be treated as an unnatural son. Is there no distinction between internationalism and anti-patriotism? To love your village more than your home, your country more than your village, and the whole world more than your country, does not mean that you do not love your home. But this love of home, so natural that it can be said to be common both to man and beast, should produce, with a respect for one's neighbour's home, as sincere a sympathy for his fatherland. Ready to welcome

all our brothers in our home, we should mutually lose those prejudices which make us feel as strangers with them. And we should arrive at considering the whole world as our common fatherland, which has been submitted to temporary and artificial divisions on account of the difficulties arising from the means of communication, and the still more precarious character of our particular civilisations. Thus the love of the fatherland will lose its violent and hostile character, and will only tend to develop the possibilities of each nation, the integral part of the Great Universal Fatherland.

WORK

IF Bahaism gives a large share to the sentimental side of human nature, because of that it does not neglect the practical side, and for this reason its kingdom is indeed of this world.

“O my servant ! The lowest of men are those who bear no fruit upon the earth ; they are indeed counted as dead. . . . The best of people are they who gain by work, and spend for themselves and their kind in the Love of God, the Lord of the creatures.”¹

Besides, in the *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, each

¹ Cp. Bahā'u'llāh, *Hidden Words*, p. 56 (Chicago, 1905).

one is commanded to exercise a profession, an art, a trade, from which he will derive his means of existence and which will permit him to utilise all his faculties for his own welfare and that of others. Idleness, in all classes of society and in all latitudes, is the generator of miseries.

Bahaism does not permit the priesthood to be classed amongst lucrative professions. Thus, the obligation of the priest to exercise his activity in a practical way, joined to the absolute interdiction to receive a salary for the practice or teaching of religion, is a radical obstacle to the eventual constitution of clergy in Bahaism. It is known that the absence of any sacerdotal hierarchy is one of the fundamental characteristics of Bahā'u'l-lāh's religion ; and this prohibition of a

material order sanctions in a practical way the numerous passages of his work where he warns his disciples against anything, far or near, that might resemble a priesthood.

“You are forbidden to mount the pulpit. He who wishes to sing for you the verses of his Lord, let him be seated in a place on the divan, and let him mention God, his Lord and the Lord of beings.”¹

It is not necessary to urge, in order to show to what extent this detail of organisation, minimum in appearance, is important through its consequences: What would become of the influence of the priests on crowds if they sat in their ranks, instead of admonishing them

¹ *Kitābu'l-Āqdas*, loc. cit. p. 53.

from the tops of their pulpits or mim-bars ?

Therefore it is not only monastic life under all its forms that is condemned, but also everything which, under pretext of religion, turns away man from the exercise of his natural activity. "O Concourse of priests, leave the bells, then come out from the Churches," exclaimed Bahā'u'llāh in the *Lawhi Āqdas*, an epistle which he wrote especially to the Christians, thus exhorting the members of the Catholic clergy to mix more completely in life, not to take refuge in celibacy, sheltered from the difficulties and charges which are incumbent on other men. On this condition only they can in verity be pastors, otherwise they would prohibit to themselves for ever the

most beautiful and the most efficacious predication, that of example.

We have just seen that Bahaism re-commends man to use his activity on lucrative work from which he will derive his means of existence. Consequently it is clear that he proclaims as legitimate private property, acquired fortune.

“After man has realised his own being and become mature, then for him wealth is needed. If this wealth is acquired through a craft and profession, it is approvable and worthy of praise to men of wisdom, especially to those servants (i.e. men) who arise to train the world and beautify the souls of nations.”¹

No place is there, then, for certain

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablet of Ṭarāzāt*, p. 5 (Chicago 1906);

collectivist or communist theories, so much the fashion in our day, which may appear fascinating to utopian minds but which are especially destructive of all individual initiative, and consequently of all progress. It is always by favouring that which contributes to individual development that Bahaism intends to improve society.

The tax of one-ninth on capital, of which we have already spoken, and which represents the contributory part of each in the social charges, will always hinder a too large fortune from being made by private people, without profit for the masses, for every increase of capital is submitted to it.

To decree the socialisation of instruments of production, to limit the profits

of capital, to regulate the participation of work in these same profits, all these different measures can have their merit.

But that does not suffice. Socialism cannot only be imposed by law, it must come from the heart. Otherwise, if society as a whole is not ready to abandon ancient ways, supposing even that such measures could not be evaded by those that they inconvenience, who does not see that those measures would risk ending in a dispossession of the minority without profit for the whole, and in precipitating society in disorder ?

It is not from disorder that the Bahais—contrary to certain enlightened theorists—expect progress, but from the conscious and continued exercise of love and brotherhood.

“O children of Dust, Let the rich learn the midnight sighing of the poor, lest negligence destroy them and they be deprived of their portion of the tree of wealth.” “O ye who are wealthy on earth, the poor among ye are my trust, therefore guard my trust, and be not wholly occupied with your own ease.”¹

For years ‘Abdu’l-Bahā has unceasingly exhorted his compatriots to practise such a philanthropy. Long before ideas of liberty had assumed in Persia the solid form that has ended in the present evolution, which, in spite of the difficulties and hesitations of the period of commencement, is about to regenerate the country, he indicated to his disciples all that they could expect from the application of the

¹ Cp; Bahā‘u’llāh, *Hidden Words*, pp. 42 and 45.

system of association. Dissuading them from mixing themselves up in political struggles which should only attract those who through their professions or studies have acquired the necessary competency, he persuaded them, on the contrary—by forming provident societies, societies of scientific research, assemblies for ethical culture—to group their efforts together with a view to realising improvements depending solely on themselves; in short, to put their activity into questions where private initiative can and ought to show the way to the State.

Thus is explained the apparently passive role played by the Bahais in contemporary events in Persia and Turkey. But if they have abstained from taking part in the agitations which have

troubled public order, who does not see that the changes about to be accomplished are due to the slow infiltration of the liberal and progressive ideas represented by their doctrine ?

A subject so vast as the one we have just treated so cursorily, since it embraces the whole field of human activity, would have required, we are aware, a more ample development. In this rapid sketch we have merely wished to indicate the universal character of the Bahai religion and morality, and to point out that it is indeed a practical religion, a manner of life applicable to every environment, and the best, we believe, for

the development and progress of the individual and of society.

The end of the reign of dogma opens up that of human reason. It is no longer in the secrecy of deserted sanctuaries that man goes to sound the Eternal Mystery: every day science throws its torch farther into the domain of nature, from which even the supernatural is not excluded, and in this respect the laboratory has replaced the Church. But religion always remains the most solid and most necessary basis of all social organizations, and the only possible bond between societies. In order to fulfil its aim it cannot remain stereotyped in its earliest form: it must evolve concurrently with the progress of humanity, of which it is, moreover, the efficacious mainspring.

If the different religious ceremonies, which are nearly all that exist of the ancient religions, then must fall into disuse ; if no creed can any longer be imposed, it is all the more important that our actions, by their morality, come more and more up to the ideal of beauty about which we all agree. The more and more we understand that in order to really live, we must endeavour with all our might to serve the divine work of the universe !

Bahaism shows each one the way he must follow to attain this end. Thus is explained its rapid progress accomplished in the world, as well as the fact that, to all those who study it closely, it appears as the synthesis of their highest aspirations.

THE END

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